

THE
VALE OF INNOCENCE:

A VISION.

VERSES TO AN INFANT DAUGHTER.

AND

SONNETS

ON SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE REV. J. BLACK.

WOODBRIDGE: Printed and Sold by R. LODGE,

Sold also by J. JOHNSON, St. Paul's Church-Yard, London.

M. DCC. LXXXV.

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T O

THE LADIES OF THE BOOK-SOCIETY,
WOODBIDGE.

LADIES,

AS I have always regarded your useful, and laudable Society with singular pleasure; and have sometimes had the honour of being admitted to your agreeable Meetings;---I thought, the following little Publication, could no where better seek for shelter, than under your protection.

Though the critic should condemn, and the world over-look it; yet, if it be honoured with your approbation, I shall be happy; for, to me, the reputation of a Poet, is an object of much less value than the good opinion of so respectable a circle.

I am,

Ladies, with much esteem,
your most obedient Servant,

JOHN BLACK.

WOODBIDGE, Octob. 14th, 1785.

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Ladies, with much esteem,
Your most obedient servant,

JOHN BLACK.

Woodbridge, Oct. 18th. 1831.

LETTER

TO MISS THOMSON OF SPRING GARDENS, EDIN-
BURGH, WITH THE FOLLOWING VISION, ON HER
SENDING THE AUTHOR A PICTURE OF INNO-
CENCE, PAINTED BY HERSELF.

Dear Madam,

BEING much pleased with the PICTURE OF
INNOCENCE, with which you have favoured me, and for which I
return you my thanks, I could not help thinking of it after I was
retired to rest. When we are reclined on bed, and all around us
is still, the Imagination is apt to rove with so much quickness from
object to object; and sleep steals on so imperceptibly, that it is
almost impossible to distinguish, by the mere operations of the
Fancy, whether one be asleep or awake. I will not, therefore, pre-
tend, in plain prose, to decide absolutely in which state I was,
when my Imagination took the excursion I am about to describe.
As the scenery seems not unpoetical, I shall endeavour to describe
it in the language of Poetry.

B

However

However visionary my description may appear, nothing can be more real than the regard with which I subscribe myself,

Dear Madam,

your sincere Friend,

JOHN BLACK.

BEING which begins with the picture of
 a landscape, with which you have favoured me, and for which I
 return you my thanks. I could not help thinking of it after I was
 obliged to rest. When we are reclined on bed, and all around us
 is still, the imagination is apt to rove with so much freedom from
 object to object, and keep itself on so imperceptibly that it is
 almost impossible to distinguish, by the mere operations of the
 fancy, what is the object of vision. I will not therefore
 send my plain prose to describe a picture in which there I was
 when my imagination took the extension I am about to describe.
 As the fancy seems not to be able to find a language to describe
 it in the language of truth.

Howbeit

THE VALE OF INNOCENCE :

A VISION.

IN museful mood, upon my bed reclin'd,
 While your fair Present occupied my mind :
 My waking senses scarce had sleep subdued,
 When Fancy's eye innumerable prospects view'd.
 O'er many a mountain, light I seem'd to climb,
 That, as the Andes, rose in air, sublime :
 O'er rugged rocks, I sometimes seem'd to go,
 To wander sometimes by the streams below.

At last, I reach'd a wide, extended vale,
 Where balmy fragrance floated on the gale :
 Among the groves, ten thousand tuneful throats,
 Pour'd on the ear, their wild, melodious notes :
 While all-around were heard these melting strains,
 The sight was ravish'd with the beauteous plains ;
 Where flowers of every scent and hue were seen,
 Inwove, by nature, with the velvet green ;

And

And stately trees, of every distant clime,
 With wild luxuriance, wav'd, in leafy prime :
 The wanton fawns, in many a chearful bound,
 Exulting play'd their milky dams around ;
 And smiling groups of prattling children stray'd,
 In garlands gay, of fairest flowers, array'd :
 Some, to the music of the tuneful reed,
 In mazy dances, trod the verdant mead :
 Not fairy elves, amid the moon-light glade,
 E'er lighter tript, or sweeter music made.
 Some, lonely stray'd, far distant from the throng,
 And, pensive, listen'd to the woodland-song ;
 Or, with a book, reclin'd beneath the shade,
 While, with their locks, the breezes lightly play'd.
 Others, with scenes of future glory fir'd,
 To rising hillocks' grassy brows retir'd ;
 Where, in the turf, they forts, and trenches form'd,
 Now armies routed, and now castles storm'd.

But endless were it to recount their joys,
 Their schemes, their pastimes, and their numerous toys.

A spreading stream flow'd, winding thro' the vale,
 Whose glassy breast, unruffled by the gale,
 Reflected back the glories of the sky,
 With silvery willows, gently waving nigh.
 Here sail'd the swan, with downy breast elate,
 And arching neck, in all his swimming state.

Fast by the flood, arose a swelling mound,
 Whose sides with flowers, whose top with trees was crown'd.
 Where leafy palms diffus'd a pleasant shade,
 Fair INNOCENCE, in flowing white array'd,
 Sat mid her train;—rais'd on a flowery throne,
 In modest state, and youthful bloom, she shone.
 No crown she wore, no sceptre of command;
 A fleecy lamb fed from her lilly-hand.
 Her auburn hair, a carmine fillet bound,
 Her wavy ringlets loosely flow'd around.
 With careless ease, her veil was backward flung,
 And o'er her lamb, with placid look, she hung.
 Such she appear'd, as, by the pencil's aid,
 In glowing colours, thou hast well portray'd.

Permit the Muse, Fair Thomson, then to pause, and pause a
 And offer thee, her tribute of applause.
 In riper years, how must thy powers excel,
 Whose youthful pencil now performs so well
 Already, in thy works, we view, combin'd,
 An ardent genius, and a taste refin'd
 If thou still aim'st, sweet artist, to improve,
 All must thy works admire, as now thy charms they love.

But let the Muse pursue her purpos'd theme,
 And tell the rest of this romantic dream.
 A beauteous Nymph* before the Queen appear'd,
 Whom to behold, her eyes she gently rear'd
 On her white bosom, which, with easy swell;
 Rose soft, yet firm, her graceful tresses fell
 O'er her fair face, health's rosy hues were spread;
 In her moist eyes, love's purple lightnings play'd;
 She lowly bending, the fair Queen address'd,
 And in few words, her humble suit express'd :
 That, hence she might conduct a youthful train,
 Who anxious sought to quit that flowery plain,

And wander thro' the wide world's devious ways,
 In search of profit, pleasure, or of praise,
 Her suit was heard :—the Queen swift gave command,
 That this fair group around her throne should stand :
 Then, ere they were permitted hence to go,
 She thus 'gan warn them of each guileful foe :
 “ Ye who are now to quit our peaceful scenes,
 Our harmless sports, and never fading greens ;
 Whom, Fame, and Virtue beckon hence away,
 And Happiness will not permit to stay :
 'Tis meet their paths you ardent should pursue,
 And keep their forms still present to your view.
 On three high mountains their fair Fanes appear,
 And proud in air, their lofty turrets rear ;
 But of the three, Fame's blazes far most bright,
 While Virtue's oft, can scarce attract the sight :
 Yet those, who wish true Glory to attain,
 Must rise to Fame, by Virtue's humbler Fane ;
 Nor can true Happiness be e'er procur'd,
 By those, who Virtue's toils have not endur'd.
 But

But ah ! before her Temple you can gain,
 Great are the labours, that you must sustain.
 Yourself from dangers, tho' you might defend,
 Yet snares unseen on every step attend :
 But most beware ! of those, that may arise,
 In FLATTERY'S mask, and FRIENDSHIP'S treacherous guise.

AMBITION oft will meet you on your way,
 And strive to lure you from your path astray :
 In lofty style he talks of wealth, and power,
 And Fame's bright wreath, the daring spirit's dower.
 He shows his house, and calls it that of Fame,
 (Oft has it been mistaken for the same :)
 Let not its splendours tempt you, but beware !
 Baseless it floats on clouds of poisonous air.
 Foul Infamy's dread den beneath it yawns :
 Ah ! place unblest, where Fame's light never dawns !
 Here dwells each thing the most abhorr'd and foul :—
 Huge serpents hiss, bats shriek, and tygers howl :
 While still, to add more horrors to the sound,
 Fierce whirlwinds groan the dreary cavern round :

Unwholsome

Unwholsome fogs, and exhalations rise,
And with thick, murky clouds obscure the skies,
Those, who sink down in this sad noisome place,
Here lie for ever :—hence there's no release!

With loose-rob'd PLEASURE too expect to meet :
Her air is winning, and her accents sweet :
Her face is flush'd, but not with health's soft blooms ;
Her flaunting robes are steep'd in rich perfumes :
And much she boasts of gardens, roseate bowers,
Of baths of bliss, and couches strow'd with flowers.
She Happiness presumes herself to call ;
But all her sweets are dash'd with bitter gall.
Her fairy-dwelling, with enchanting shows,
Invites the traveller there to seek repose :
And, while each thing around him real seems,
The hapless wight himself most happy deems :
But when he would his wearied powers restore,
On beds of flowers, — loud winds around him roar,
The beauteous fabric instant melts away :
And lo ! he's left thro' dreary wilds to stray.

INTEMPERANCE, with his cup you next espy,
 Squeezing rich fruits, that tempting strike the eye.
 The traveller, with long toilsome marches spent,
 All faint and weary, and with dust besprent,
 Oft views, with fond desire, the dangerous cup,
 First gently sips, then quaffing, drinks it up :
 To his parched lips, it fresh, and cool appears,
 And from the draught no bad effects he fears ;
 But as the liquor he still deeper drains,
 His blood inflam'd, boils thro' his throbbing veins ;
 His eyes grow dim, his staggering reason reels ;—
 The Sorcerer waves his rod ;—no longer sense he feels.

'Gainst sluggish INDOLENCE, be on your guard,
 Left, by his wiles, he should your steps retard.
 With languid ease, and with half-closed eyes,
 Flung on a couch, beneath a rock he lies ;
 Whence rolls a river with a lulling sound,
 Dash'd into foam, and murmuring far around :
 Those, who, from Glory's path, here turn aside,
 This lulling murmur tempts still to abide ;
 Till

Till o'er them, he his magic spells diffuse,
 And steep their senses in Lethean dews :
 Then lead them bound, in listless languor's chain,
 To blank Oblivion's dark, obscure domain.

On single foes, I can no longer dwell,
 And time would fail me all their names to tell.
 Let Reason o'er your every step preside,
 And steady Prudence be your constant guide.
 To guard your bosoms 'gainst the arrows keen,
 Which subtle Malice basely aims unseen,
 This precious JEWEL* from my hand receive :—
 Tho' now it shine bright as the star of eve,
 When e'er you deviate from fair Virtue's way,
 This power 'twill loose, its lustre will decay ;
 As you to measure back your wanderings strive,
 Its power and lustre will again revive. ”
 Here ceas'd the QUEEN : they take a kind adieu,
 And with glad hearts their various tracks pursue.
 But on their out-set, such loud shouts arose,
 The VISION fled, with all its pleasing shows.

* The Consciousness of INNOCENCE.

TO MY DAUGHTER ALISON, ON BAPTIZING HER,
AFTER ALEXANDER ALISON, ESQUIRE, OF EDIN-
BURGH.

UPON the world's wide ocean early cast,
Thy Father was exposed to every blast,
'Reft of his Sire, ere he could lisp his name,
To form his heart, or wayward passions tame,
Yet still, a tender Mother's pious care
Guarded his infant-years from every snare;
But ah! too soon, she left this world, to join
Her long lost Partner in the realms divine.
Then Danger and Temptation stalk'd around,
And frosty Want, with blasting visage, frown'd;
The love of Learning, Virtue, and of Fame
Inspir'd him still, and these fell Fiends o'ercame.
As the glad traveller, who at distance views
His wish'd-for home, the rugged path pursues
With ardent steps, nor fears approaching night,
While fancied scenes of friends belov'd invite:

So

So he, regardless of his present state,
 All dangers spurn'd, with rising hope elate.
 But ah! without a guide, he might have stray'd,
 Or by a false companion been betray'd ;
 But Providence, before he wander'd far,
 His steps conducted, by a friendly star,
 To ALISON,—who, with a generous heart,
 Did needful aid, and sage advice impart :
 Directed how each dangerous path to shun ;
 How, with applause, the race of Life to run ;
 How Learning's steep ascent he best might gain :—
 He, thus instructed, has not toil'd in vain :
 The misty vale retiring, he beholds ;
 And as he mounts, each step new charms unfolds.

To heaven, Dear Infant, now thy parents raise
 Their swelling voice in songs of grateful praise,
 And bless the Providence, that lent them friends,
 When most they needed, and them still defends.
 Their just esteem for ALISON to show,
 His name respected, they on thee bestow.

O ! may his virtues too adorn thy mind !
 A friend in him, the friendless ever find :
 Sincere devotion lifts his soul on high ;
 And mild humanity illumines his eye :
 Celestial truth his every step attends :—
 Long may he bless the public, and his friends !
 If length of days to thee, sweet Babe, be given,
 Live as he lives, then soar with him to heaven.

SONNETS ON SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

SONNET I.

TO GEORGE DEMPSTER, ESQUIRE,

ON HEARING THAT HE HAD REFUSED TO SUFFER HIS CARRIAGE TO
BE DRAWN BY HIS FELLOW SUBJECTS.

BRITANNIA oft indignant has beheld
The boasted champions of fair Freedom's cause,
With self-importance insolently swell'd,
O'erlook Humanity's benignant laws ;
And, while they promis'd millions to defend,
Make British Subjects their ignoble slaves.
Round thee, O DEMPSTER, Freedom's steady friend,
No bawling mob of misfed wretches raves ;
But, while their hearts with gratitude o'erflow,
For thy unwearied patriotic zeal,
Thy fellow subjects strive their sense to show
Of thy great labours for the public weal,—
Thy generous soul all such respect disdains
As would, on Freedom's Sons, impose the slightest chains.

SONNET II.

TO THE REVEREND ISAAC CLARKE.

WRITTEN IN THE EVENING OF THE 11th. OF NOVEMBER, 1784.

WHEN THE WIND WAS HIGH.

SWIFT sweep the clouds along the blackening sky,
 Loud in the wind the tossing trees resound ;
 The sinking gale seems ready now to die,
 Now stronger swells, and strews with leaves the ground.
 The still, and peaceful eve let others hail,
 When not a leaf stirs with the gentle breeze ;
 When CYNTHIA'S gleam rests on the lengthening vale,
 Or glitters broken thro' wide branching trees.
 Sweet is the mildness of the moon-light scene !
 The pleasures sweet, still, peaceful eves inspire !
 Yet sweeter far, O CLARKE ! to thee, I ween,
 This solemn night, in tune to OSSIAN'S lyre !
 For now thy Fancy, spurning earth and time,
 Soars with each shadowy Form, and converse holds sublime.

SONNET III.

TO A FRIEND,

ON THE RETURN OF TWO OF HIS SONS TO ENGLAND, FROM THE
EAST-INDIES, WHERE THEY HAD BEEN PRISONERS FOR UPWARDS
OF TWO YEARS, DURING WHICH TIME THEIR FATHER HAD BEEN
KEPT IN AN ANXIOUS STATE OF SUSPENSE, NEVER HAVING HEARD
FROM THEM.

HER dun veil long Uncertainty had hung,
'Twixt thee and hope's fair scene, left that should cheer
Thy anxious breast, which silent sorrow wrung,
While for thy sons oft stream'd the secret tear.

Fear imaged them, now 'whelm'd in ocean's tide,
Now, faint and drooping on the scorching sand ;
Sometimes it said—they wretchedly had died
Beneath the cruelty of Hyder's hand.

But, since they safe have reach'd the British shore,
Permit the Muse to hail the gladsome day,
That soon shall give them to thy sight once more,
And Doubt and Fear be banish'd far away :

Then, while their breasts with various passions glow,
Their friends shall all their toils, and hardships know.

Nov. 18th 1784.

F

S I O N N E T I V

DESIGNED FOR AN INSCRIPTION IN A GROVE NEAR WOODBRIDGE.

WHOE'ER ye be, that stray these trees among,

Here pause awhile, and read a mournful tale !

If e'er with joy you heard the woodland song,

A pensive warbler's loss you must bewail.

On this fell spot, with patient, anxious care,

A lowly WREN* had form'd her mossy nest,

With matted grafs o'er-arch'd from the bleak air,

Which she, fond bird ! hop'd nought could e'er molest.

Her brooding fondness now success had crown'd,

And all the young had from their prisons broke ;

When lo ! a steed approach'd with thundering sound,

And crush'd the roof !—herself scarce scap'd the stroke.

If thou hast children, go, her sorrows share !

Thy roof too Fate may crush !—Yet doubt not Heav'ns just care !

* The Yellow Wren : called in Suffolk, the Oven-bird, from the form of its nest.

SONNET V.

SEE'ST thou the shepherd boy on yonder hill,
 How busily his little tower he rears?
 What self-important thoughts his bosom fill!
 That slender pile, he trusts, shall stand for years.
 But soon, perhaps, some furly, neighbouring swain
 May wantonly his labours all o'erthrow;
 Or he, perchance, be summon'd to the plain,
 And forc'd awhile his bright schemes to forego.
 Yet still, as oft as e'er he comes that way,
 To feed his flock, the work he will renew:
 Tho' baffled still—still will his mind be gay;
 And, big with hope, his toils he'll still pursue.
 So let me still, build CASTLES IN THE AIR!
 Oft as they topple down, let Fancy them repair!

SONNET VI.

WHILE the bright colours slowly melt away,
 That late the western clouds so richly dight,
 And gradual darkness steals upon the light,
 Thro' flowery vales, and groves I love to stray,
 And silent mark the Glow-worm's kindling ray,
 That mid the dunnest walks, and deepest glooms,
 The long dank grass, with greenish light, illumines,
 And glads the eye; and cheers the dusky way.
 Tho' now it spread a radiance thro' its sphere,
 'Twas pale by day, unheeded, and unseen:
 Thus humble Virtue oft may dim appear,
 Where gaudy Fortune spreads her dazzling green;
 But in the gloom of drear Affliction's night,
 While all is dark around, she shines in native light.

SONNET VII.

ON VISITING ORFORD, AND NOT BEING ABLE TO LEARN WHETHER
THE BODY OF A FRIEND, WHO WAS SHIPWRECKED OFF THAT
PLACE SEVERAL YEARS AGO, HAD EVER BEEN FOUND AND INTER-
RED.

WITH penfive soul these Ruins* I survey,
Deeply reflecting on the wrecks of Time;
Whose hand, unseen, sweeps all our joys away;
Subverts each work of man, how'er sublime.
But when from hence the roaring main I view,
A deepening gloom o'er spreads my thoughtful breast;
The tear of fond Remembrance swells anew,
For thee, my BURNESSE! tho' long since at rest.
Was't not enough, far from thy native home,
In early youth, to sink beneath the wave!
But must thy Friend, while here, by chance, I roam,
Want the poor solace, to behold thy Grave!
To pluck the weeds, that on its sod might grow;
And nurse the flowers with tears—sad luxury of woe!

G

* Of the Castle and Chancel; the last of which is a curious piece of Saxon Architecture.

SONNET VIII.

MILD as the beam, that gilds the glassy deep,

In the fair eve, when Cynthia cloudless reigns :

Sweet as the violet, on the tangled steep :

Soft as the primrose, sprinkled o'er the plains :

Fair as the lilly, when it fairest blows,

Reflecting back the rose's blushing hue ;

And meekly modest, as the cowslip grows,

Nurs'd in the meadow, by the gentlest dew !

Could those of highest state behold this Flower,

Eager they'd seek the treasure to possess.—

Shield it, O Heav'n ! from every welt'ring shower !

Ah ! let no foot unweeting on it press !

May it, transplanted from its native plain,

Yield its sweet fragrance to some gentle Swain,

Safe lodg'd, in some fair bower, from storms, and beating rain.

S O N G.

UNDERNEATH this shady tree,

Safely we may rest awhile :

Come, my MAIA, sit by me,

Converse sweet will time beguile.

Here then, let us moralize,

As the fleeting shadow flies !

Life, thus quickly, fleets away :

Let us then, enjoy to day !

See ! yon rye-field's wavy motion,

As the shadows o'er it sweep ;

Like the surface of the ocean,

When no storm disturbs the deep.

As light breezes o'er it stray,

See ! it dances, green, and gay !

Like the breeze, life hastes away :

Let us then, enjoy to day !

See! the grey-peaks' purple bloom

Far more pleasing to the eye,

Than what'er the Tyrian loom

Wove, tho' dipt in richest dye.

Soon those beauteous tints will fade

Soon those blossoms all be dead.

Thus too must thy bloom decay

Let us then, enjoy to day!

F I N I S

Let us then, enjoy to day!

See! yon field's waving grain

As the sunbeams play on the plain

Like the surface of the ocean

18

When no storm disturbs the deep.

As light breezes o'er it sweep,

See! it dances, green, and gay!

Like the breeze, life hastes away

Let us then, enjoy to day!

